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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RIO DE JANEIRO 001228

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SUBJECT: Garotinho Scores Victory, Loses Ground

Ref: Rio de Janeiro 1118

¶1. Summary. Despite winning a narrow victory in the Regional Electoral Tribunal (TRE) that restored his political rights, Anthony Garotinho (Rio de Janeiro's ex-governor and 2006 presidential candidate) appears to be losing ground in his quest for the presidency. His own PMDB party has been lukewarm toward his pre-candidacy, and a series of recent polls show him slipping in popularity. The only scenario where he would force a second round of elections with President Lula is one in which the opposition PSDB does not run a candidate, an unlikely scenario at best. With plenty of time and a formidable political machine at his disposal, however, Garotinho is still likely to play an important role in next year's elections.

Garotinho's Court Woes Finally Over (for Now)

¶2. In a controversial 4-3 decision, the TRE of Rio de Janeiro recently decided to uphold the political rights of ex-governor Anthony Garotinho and his wife Rosinha, the current governor of the state. Unless the decision is appealed to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and overturned, this means Garotinho is eligible to run for the presidency in 2006. The justifications of the four judges that voted to vindicate the couple on charges of electoral corruption were somewhat bizarre, including one judge who noted that the suspect funds were not really all that significant of a sum (around USD 100,000) and another who argued that even if the money was meant to buy votes, the fact that it was apprehended before it could be spent meant that no crime was actually committed. The earliest that the TSE would take up the case is probably in March of 2006.

... but Electoral Woes Just Beginning

¶3. Despite the legal victory, Garotinho appears to be slipping in popularity (for a variety of reasons discussed in reftel). A recent poll by the opinion firm IBOPE found him trailing a distant third (with 9 percent of the vote) to President Lula and Jose Serra of the PSDB, and roughly even with Geraldo Alckmin of the PSDB (at 15 percent of the vote) if he were to be the candidate of that party. In any scenario in which Garotinho forced a second round with Lula, he was projected to be crushed decisively.

¶4. A similar poll by Datafolha showed Garotinho losing out to any PSDB candidate by margins between 17 and 3 percent depending on the candidate. More worrying for Garotinho is the head-to-head scenario with Lula - after three consecutive polls where Garotinho gradually increased from 24 percent to 32 percent of the vote, he slipped to 31 percent in the most recent version.

¶5. Along with the gloomy polling data, Garotinho must also contend with continued resistance from within his own PMDB party, the leaders of which are reluctant to endorse his candidacy because of his controversial past and his populist rhetoric. The party leadership has also not ruled out an alliance with President Lula, which would mean that no candidate would be put forward. Despite offers from other parties, Garotinho appears to believe his best chance of victory lies with the PMDB and is dedicating himself to wooing the delegates who will choose the party's candidate (if they run one).

Candidate or Power Broker?

¶6. The role that Garotinho will play in the coming election will depend greatly on his ability to mobilize both his own party and his broad national base of evangelicals. In this respect, his lack of a day job will work to his advantage, as he recently resigned his position in his wife's government to devote himself fully to his campaign. He has publicly announced that he will travel the entire country speaking to as many of the 24,000 PMDB delegates as possible prior to the party convention in March.

¶7. He has also stepped up his daily broadcasts of religious messages in his role as a member of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. His daily hour-long program, "Words of Faith," is broadcast over 180 radio stations in 20 Brazilian states and reaches a vast portion of Brazil's growing and

politically active evangelical population. This segment voted strongly in favor of him during the last election, and he can be expected to once again control a substantial portion of these votes.

18. If Garotinho is unsuccessful in his bid to gain the PMDB candidacy or the PMDB decides not to run its own candidate, he has stated that he will throw his support behind Jose Alencar, of the recently formed Republican Party of Brazil (PRB), who also has a strong base in the evangelical movement. This would add considerable weight to Alencar's candidacy - which is currently not even on the radar screen - although probably not enough to carry the election. Still, it would create a sizable bloc with significant negotiating power if the election goes to a dead heat in the second round between Lula and Serra, and could end up deciding the next president (the overall evangelical population in Brazil is estimated to be between 25 and 40 million voters.)

ATKINS